

PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF TIME AND SOCIAL CHANGE (*)

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the psychosocial construction of the conceptions of time and social change, and their relation with the notion of progress set up by modernity as well as their contradictory aspects, considering their historicity as psychosocial and social phenomena. The social construction of the notion of time is discussed; it responds to social organization forms, thus turning the social changes into historical and temporal landmarks. The association between social changes and social movements is argued and the concept of progress is deconstructed. Finally, the importance of the idea of movement in the construction of time, change and progress concepts is pointed out; it is also explained how modernity imbued such notions with direction and goals, in the direction of an arrow, according to the prevailing interests, while modeling them in its own image and likeness.

Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river that drags me but I am the river; it is a fire that devours me, but I am the fire.

Jorge Luis Borges (1947)

Psychology and Temporality

On considering time, psychology seems to have approached it as if it were a notion or concept of universal validity defined *a priori*. It was important to know how individuals had acquired that notion during the evolution process. Such consideration implicitly presupposed that once the notion was assimilated, the acquired object responded to a previously established canon which was fixed and invariable. Even taking into account cultural and historical differences as well as every variation they may introduce, the notion still supposes the existence of time as an entity in some way separate and independent to some extent from the subject that acquires it.

From a psychosocial perspective, even though considerations of time received some attention within the social sciences and especially, in the emerging discipline of social and collective psychology at the beginning of the century - Halbwachs' works on the social frameworks of collective memory (1907; 1925) are a salient example- later on, time was restricted to the role of a mere "intervening variable", or of the object or content of mediating cognitive processes. In the psychological literature of the 40s, 50s and 60s it is possible to find more often than not that psychological phenomena are treated as time independent phenomena. Thus, the historical nature of psychological

processes became but a reference, a trivial detail that made no contribution to the topic in question. Some even considered that if an event was historical, it lay beyond the interest of psychology.

However, the panorama started to change as from the 70s. In 1973 Kenneth Gergen published an article which shook the academic spheres. In that paper he stated that Social Psychology should be considered a historical inquiry, since many of the phenomena it studies are unique, besides fluctuating throughout time, a fact strong enough in itself to provide the study of psychological phenomena with a socio-historical frame. This article opened the way to the introduction of the historical conception of psychosocial phenomena within the field of Anglo-Saxon social psychology. It should be mentioned that within the social sciences the need to acknowledge that historical nature of social phenomena had already been remarked in Latin America and in some European countries (France, Italy). However, psychology cannot be regarded as a pioneer discipline in this respect, probably due to the prevailing influence of the mainstream psychology carried out in the United States at that time.

The construction of a new paradigm, as well as the transformations derived from the practice relative to material conditions of life specific for the different historical, economic and social contexts would introduce the force of circumstances into the academic field and start the critical revision of the time independent condition (Montero, 1978). In spite of resistance, once the historical nature has been acknowledged, it is difficult to maintain the time independent condition attributed to psychological events. The 80s and 90s show the growing importance of the discussion about the temporal nature of Psychology and its condition of social construction (Parker, 1989; Montero, 1994). Moreover, the proposition that the historical perspective may be regarded as a means to challenge naturalized convictions and to study the notion of time in its psychosocial dimension is stated.

Thus, Gergen's idea is renewed in 1994 by Blackman, who proposes an "archaeological" consideration of Psychology as a history of the present, bearing a fundamental responsibility for the constitution of the contemporary psychological objects. This position emphasizes the constructed and relative nature of psychological knowledge, which means this is not a natural process but one determined both culturally and temporally. Even though these articles broaden the scope of Psychology, the history of contemporary facts and events does not exhaust for researchers the issue of apprehending the variations, the unique phenomena demanding a vision of continuity, of duration. Nor does it exhaust the inquiry into the psychological aspects of the nature of that essential dimension called time.

The notion of time

Time has been defined in various ways: as a *becoming*, i.e. as "the extent to which the different states of a same thing develop", or to which "different things occur in the same place" (Moliner, 1994: 1307). Also, time has been assigned the quality of flow which has come to be regarded as pathetic for it refers to the "succession of instants that inexorably come and go by and in which life and activity take place" (Moliner, idem). This idea is centered on the ephemeral nature of time and, on the perishable nature of life constructed within it. From youth to the Spanish poet Bcquer's "dark swallows", including the Heraclitean waters, as Teresa de Avila said, *todo se pasa* [everything goes by]. Depending on the outlook, this can be either a terrifying or a comforting idea since defining time is a question of how the moments *before* and *after* certain events are perceived -as Aristotle sustained (*the here and now that is not*)- or Einstein's *time-illusion*, or the *time-degradation* of entropic phenomena (Prigogine, 1991). And today -as much as in the 6th century- time remains as indefinable as it was for Saint Augustine (*the having been that no longer is*). (1)

The social construction of time: the temporal landmarks

The aforementioned definitions present some common features: they are based either on the presence of discernible and important changes for individuals subject to them, or on the idea of development, of passing of time. This leads me to pose some questions: Is the process of *becoming* the result of the passing of time? Do psychological phenomena exert an influence on that process in such a way that those processes become temporal landmarks? In the first case, time would have an existence *per se*. Time would pass by, elapse, regardless of the occurrence of relevant events. In the second proposition, time is considered to be the result of the social events that mark changes. It is considered as a construction produced by the social relationships in which events of individual and social importance point out moments, highlighting them according to the transformations introduced in daily life. An example of this is the course of the sun, which brings light and darkness introducing sensitive environmental changes that affect our daily life. Years, seasons, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds and so on do not constitute "natural" phenomena (as the rotation of stars does).

They are social constructions of mankind, made with reference to measurements established according to celestial phenomena, that have not always been the same. Therefore, it is not possible -within the scope of this presentation- to accept a classification such as the one made by Ferrarotti (1987). Ferraroti distinguishes four fundamental times: an *individual biographical* time; a *historical* time subdivided into a macrohistorical one, a political-institutional one and one related to the current

economic situation; an *ahistorical* or *sacred* time and a *natural* time. Even if the three first categories include facts which depend on social relations, when it comes to the last category Ferraroti introduces the naturalization of a way of measuring time. This naturalization is not less social than the other categories; thus it is as dependent as they are on intersubjectivity. And, moreover, it blurs the distinction between the phenomena it sets out to mark with what it marks.

Likewise, the passing of time, the idea of time as a kind of current flowing towards some destiny, is typically modern. It should be acknowledged that the relation between time and movement already existed in ancient times. However, it is modernity that legalizes, systematizes and imparts a new direction to this notion. Latour (1994: 92) sustains that this perspective entails "*a particular form of historicity*", which can be interpreted in different ways: as a cycle, as decadence, as a fall, as instability, as return, or as a continuous presence. In consequence, this concept should be referred to as temporality, in order to differentiate it from time (Latour, 1994: 92).

Time measurements are ways to introduce a socially determined order. At the psychological level, we use the terms "beliefs", "attitudes", "attributions", "representations" and in general "forms of social categorization" in order to describe the ways people represent their knowledge of the world. Devices are, thus, generated to help order and regulate daily life, as well as to explain and evaluate events, trying to understand and apprehend them by means of common sense and also according to a socially constructed order.

Social and individual events affect life according to the meaning people assign to them; these events become ways of expressing the temporal nature of social life because they originate changes. People who produce such events and are affected by them, construct them as temporal markers. Social transformations affect our behavior in such a way that we generate beliefs about them and we socially construct a temporal sense granting continuity to those mutations. As Latour states (1994, p. 101): "*Time is not a general framework but the provisional result of the relationship between beings*". Because of this, it is possible to find elements belonging to different conceptions of time within a given society. So finally, as well as at the beginning, it is the human agent who determines the content of time constructing history, because the notion of time is a consequence of relationships among human beings.

As Halbwachs expressed (1907/1977: 143), individuals in isolation can lose the notion of time, finding themselves "*unable to measure duration*". This author also proposed an idea which was apparently disregarded at that time: "*Social life implies that everyone agrees as regards time and duration and that everyone knows all the conventions they are subject to*". These social conventions would apply to specific human groups rather than being

applicable to mankind as a whole.

This happens because time is constructed in intersubjectivity, the space where the social and the individual become one through the social creation of meaning, through signification. It is within the relationships created by interacting individuals that space acquires meaning and time is constructed as part of that relationship and defined by it. Time does not exist outside relationships. Thus, it is not time that blurs relationships or makes them fade away. It is rather the erosion of those relationships and the disappearance of those memories, in other words, the transformation of the cognitive and affective remains of those activities in remembrance establishes temporal changes and creates the archaeology of daily life. The past is the result of the transformations in our relationships. Levinas (1994: 127) poses a question regarding that problem: *Can we understand time as the relation with the other, instead of visualizing it in relation with the end?* That question should not be stated as a dilemma, since both beginning and end exist as a function of the relationships with the other. The future is the virtual space where our expectations and goals to be achieved lie. It is a space that modernity has constructed as placed ahead; a space towards which we are supposed to head for according to a specific rationality.

The association between time, change and movement

It is only within a critique of Modernity that the idea of social changes as time landmarks can be borne. Such critique is supported by the decision to question those aspects of social life so deeply naturalized that they have become indisputable, and are regarded as essential aspects of life, of nature, of the universe.

The first aspect to be taken into consideration is the association between change and movement. In this sense, Aristotle (ed. 1952:278) differentiated six types of change or movement, expressed as transformations produced "between what *is* completely *real* and what *is potential*". Or, in other words, from the beginning to the end of a phenomenon. Those categories are: 1) alteration, 2) increase, 3) decrease, 4) becoming, 5) ceasing to be, and 6) locomotion. This classification indicates that change amounts to movement and is defined by the type of transformation detected in things. Or to be more precise, in the way things are usually perceived. Likewise, Aristotle (1952) considered that every object and being seeks perfection when not prevented from achieving it by obstacles posed by other objects and individuals. Thus, perfection was defined as the realization of the true nature. In this way, he introduced an agent or external cause that predetermined a goal and established a canon, placing the definition of that nature beyond human limits. Although this supposes a movement towards a state considered as optimum because it is the appropriate one, this does not mean progress. It

only indicates a movement towards the most convenient form of realization. Modernity transforms this idea by investing it with a direction and a self-changing goal: use of technology, industrialization.

Though the idea of progress is already outlined in the illuminists, in Adam Smith and in Saint Simon, who foresaw social bliss as goal for development, the enunciation of this conception has its best expression in Augusto Comte's *Discourse on the Positive Spirit* (1844/1965). It can be seen in the law of the three stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. According to that law the progression is from the first to the third stage in what Comte considered a "*fundamental movement of humankind*" (1844/1965: 57). Order and progress would lead to greater perfection and in turn progress was defined as the "*continuous advancement towards a determined goal*" (Comte, 1844/1965: 111): perfecting human nature. This was achievable through rationality, afterwards expressed in science, technique and a particular economic system. These ideas in turn influence the concept of time, introducing what has come to be termed as "the arrow of time", pointing to a direction in particular and having an irreversible path. This is the idea behind the notion that progress is the result of going forwards and upwards, of ascending and advancing.

The blurred character of social change

Change is a concept belonging to everyday life and common sense. In them, as in the social sciences, it is difficult to define. As with many other common sense notions, every person assumes s/he knows what it means; however, nobody has a precise notion. Its imprecise condition is probably the reason for this characteristic of being open enough to adapt to many circumstances and being assimilated by everybody. What really happens, however, is that change -as time-is social and individually constructed, defined and traced within a relation established between people and their environment. Social life is the interaction between the individual and the collective, macrosocial and microsocial levels interrelating in such a way that the limits between them become blurred. Both individuals and groups attribute meaning to certain events considered -personally or collectively- significant enough to introduce new ways of behavior. For some individuals, certain facts and events are crucial, this being the cause for them to adjust their behavior to them, or for them to put into action ways of assimilating what is going on to their established way of life. Any of the two ways, accommodation or assimilation, is bound to introduce transformations.

Even when the area of social change looks blurred, its orientation -according to Ibáñez (1987)- is fairly well defined, for those changes are directed towards the following goals: 1) social complexity, 2) emphasis on the independence of different societies, 3)

sophistication in the control devices and the power systems,

4) promotion in the position occupied by technological devices in social life and

5) growing importance in the role scientific knowledge and its mediation between individuals and "things" plays.

Change, development and progress

Modernity has turned us into the habit of relating social changes with transformations produced within development patterns. Development is understood, from a macrosocial perspective, as a specific model of advancement or improvement in relation to a particular state, usually a socioeconomic situation. Progress has in turn been defined, as has been said, as "*Advancement. Marching forwards. Action and effect of growing or improving any thing*" (Moliner, 1994: 854). As well as civilization, specially when referred to the "*cultural development of humankind or of a country, in general, or in a determined period or aspect*" (Moliner, *idem*). This sends us to the nineteenth century Spencerian social evolutionism, with its stages in which progress would go from a savage to a barbarian condition and from there to civilization. Ferrater Mora (1975: 487) adds that such process or evolution defining progress incorporates values. That is, it is burdened with forms of assessment socially determined.

Western culture has established industrialization and a high per capita income as signs of development and progress. This means that in the spheres of established power, industrial and technological innovations shall be well received for they may turn out to be sources of wealth, that is often associated with progress and development.

However, not every innovation is bound to produce immediate satisfaction or even be perceived as positive. Some of them imply changes in the relations of power that may be considered dangerous for the *statu quo*, or as threatening to oppose it, and are denounced as either unfair or capable of increasing social problems. Even in those groups that accept the definition of development as the last stage in the line of social evolution, as made evident in a research carried out by Idler (1994), contradictions may exist: accepting science and technology as necessary goals and at the same time questioning them, in the sense of considering that they produce a moral vacuity, and show an absence of ethical values, a lack of credibility in human potential and some incredulity in the promise, inherent to Modernity, of achieving social welfare and harmony. The "lack of ethical values" should not be assumed in this case as absence but rather as a substitution or change of certain values for others considered less virtuous or moral, according to an apparently transitional canon.

Besides, there is another problem: What about cultural development? How is it to be assessed? Culture refers to systems of interaction between people and the socially

constructed environment. It is related to lifestyles shared by social groups. In those groups, collective forms of thinking developed within specific societies, lead to the development of a shared vision of the world. The wealth of a culture does not depend on the degree of industrialization or the technological capacity of a society, it is not ruled by the same logic and cannot be measured with the same criteria. Therefore, it cannot be assessed in a *continuum* related with other manifestations of culture, for each one originates in different sources and makes use of different forms of expression. This means not only that culture and economic development are orthogonal dimensions but also that social systems are not homogeneous.

Change, stability and resistance to change

Change and stability in social groups, transformation and stagnation in societies have raised several worries in the social sciences. Both change and permanence are the result of human behavior and inter-influence psychological processes.

Social movements are often considered promoters of social change. Precisely, the relations they produce not only produce changes but these changes in turn constitute those movements. So these relations are both a consequence and their own cause. The transformations that take place within and without social movements, as part of the interchanges and interactions already mentioned, are endowed with a meaning, thus becoming time landmarks, temporal markers.

Social movements as privileged factors of social change seem to answer to the idea they mobilize, or set into motion resources that were paralyzed to that date. This gives an idea of previous stability that finds its roots in a concept of inactive *statu quo* contradicting the observation that society is essentially dynamic and the fact that in order to prevent change an intense activity has to be displayed. When performing such actions many transformations take place, whose objective is stabilizing a state, or slowing down the rhythm of change.

This states one of the most interesting enigmas in the social sciences: how do cultures manage -in spite of cultural change- to keep their distinctiveness so that they can be recognized throughout time and space? It seems that researches, when dealing with social change, favor the study of social movements, separating them in some way from everyday events, not paying due attention to the research about everyday life, the realm in which cultural practices are repeated without changes once and again, introducing modifications at the same time. Or, as Bachelard (1992, pp. 79-80) says, introducing innovations in a kind of repetition that in itself is constructive; so that habits, those apparently repetitive ways of always doing the same, shall introduce small new elements which eventually become progresses. This leads to an intriguing aspect: the imprecise and repeated acts

through which we keep ourselves doing what is considered to be traditional, and at the same time we are building something different which shall produce a future, different from the present in which we are living.

Dramatic and unexpected events also have to be taken into account together with the repetitive ways of behavior. The same can be said with respect to innovations. However, their emergence does not imply the disappearance of every way of behavior previous to them. Transformation and conservation take place simultaneously, within the same space, though not exactly at the same time. This paradox is possible because the disruptive elements become landmarks helping our memory to construct time, whereas the constant repetition of everyday actions does not usually turn out to be a temporal marker, even though those actions maintain the rhythm of life.

Two conceptions interpret human condition in relation to change and stability. One is the Aristotelian idea according to which the natural state of the bodies is rest (Aristotle, 1952), stability. Thus, the circumstances being the same, the people will choose to carry out those actions requiring less effort. According to this idea, for a change to take place, movement has to be induced while a final cause is required for bodies to move or perform an action. The other conception is the Galilean one, which states that movement is the natural state and some kind of external drive is required to stop it.

Moghaddam & Crystal (1997; 357) criticize how the theories of inter-group relationships consider some aspects of change while continuing to ignore constancy. Based on their observations, they reckon research on social constancy poses a much more complex problem than why and how changes take place. These authors wonder why is it that despite the social movements, despite the leaders' example and works, things do not change proportionally to the efforts made; why is it that very often things seem to keep the same pace and direction the change of which was sought. Hence, they wonder why continuity exists, why certain behavior models persist.

Harré & Moghaddam (1995, cited by Moghaddam & Crystal, 1997) explain this puzzle by way of the theory of what they call social reducton. A reducton would be an elemental unit of social behavior, similar to the subatomic particle known as proton. Its elemental nature derives from being carried out without a conscious effort, due to aptitudes socially acquired by the person during the socialization process. Reductons would correspond to what is culturally defined as proper or correct behavior, which is socially expected and produced in an almost automatic way, so that changes planned to be carried out at a macrosocial level do not consider or affect the basic behavior.

Cultural change takes place at macrosocial levels, such as the level of public institutions (v.g. the media, educational systems, the church); but it also occurs at microsocal levels, such as in the social practices of everyday life. And the activity that takes place at one

level may offer resistance, oppose or ignore the activity carried out at another level. Such opposition, resistance or ignorance may slow down the rhythm of the change sought. The social reduction theory states that "the maximum speed at which change may take place at the macro level (...) is faster than the potential maximum speed of change at the microsocial level" (Moghaddam & Crystal, 1977: 358). This means that social change needs to reach the psychological level and gain access to individuals so as to achieve its goals. In brief, this means that social changes will only take place when carried out by concrete people who welcome or cause them. Enforced social change inexorably requires human agents to carry it out.

Bourdieu (1972), provides a different explanation in his theory about how people give continuity to their daily tasks throughout their lives. He proposes the notion of *habitus*, a concept bearing similitude with the one later defined by Moghaddam & Crystal as reductions, leaving aside, however, the fragmentary character of such notion. The *habitus* is defined as:

... a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, by encompassing all past experiences, constantly functions as a *matrix of perceptions and actions* and enables the fulfillment of infinitely differentiated tasks thanks to the analogical transfers of schemes that allow to solve the problems in the same way, owing to the ongoing corrections of the results obtained, dialectically produced by these results. (Bourdieu, 1972: 178-179).

These are durable regularities taking place within socially constructed milieus that structure our behavior while structuring themselves in such a way that these structures establish patterns. The habits are regulated and regular practices and representations which ease social relations creating links between people and their actions. They are executed without a conscious direction, not paying attention to specific directions or domain, while regulated and adjusted, at the same time, to collective rules. The habitus allows human beings to face unexpected situations and events, implicitly anticipating the consequences of such circumstances. The habitus represents a socially encoded and expected answer that tends to reproduce objective social structures which it maintains and belongs to and from which it is the result. Moreover, the habitus does not bear any strategic intention.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus emphasizes its cultural nature as well as the "natural" way of accepting it, in the sense that it is carried out without awareness of doing something that has an aim and a specific way of being done. A habitus is carried out without thinking. Its strength lies in the fact that it is neither analyzed nor questioned, while being at the same time the link that makes up the behavior models and chains constituting daily life and supporting society. This is a holistic perspective with a cultural approach which presents

the habitus not as a behavior unit but rather as part of a whole. The concept of habitus does not reduce social behavior to elemental fractions. Its aim is to explain how culturally established behavior models are kept through unperceived regularities that become part of daily life.

What I perceive in this is that the movement generating progress and directing time is not a time independent regularity. The changes taking place in a particular sphere of society, the innovations that revolutionize the sciences, or politics or the intellectual world of a social group, do not necessarily affect to the same extent or degree most of the society. People begin to respond to such changes only when they are experienced, when they affect a person's daily life, the answers being influenced by their history. Then, time acquires other markers that allow to judge the speed or slowness of its course.

The illusion of movement: deconstructing time

Is the arrow of time irreversible? What happens when movement in one direction is interrupted? Does a revolution always mean progress? Does the absence of a revolution mean uninterrupted progress? These are other questions that the lineal conception of time bring to my mind.

Revolutions may be seen as more or less acute changes in a continuum, that interrupt it without utterly breaking it. Latour says in relation to this, that revolutions "cannot *remove the past*" (1994: 101), though they establish limits, divisions, frontiers thus indicating what has been left behind and where another "now" and a possible "ahead" are to begin. That is to say, they are time landmarks. Therefore, the very idea of modernity as a social evolution scenario is being challenged. As Latour says (1994: 103), "*we have never gone forwards or backwards. We have always actively chosen elements belonging to different times*" and "... *it is selection that that makes time, and no time that that makes the selection*". Modernity considered as current, as present, those aspects of social life that grew at the same pace as industrialization, while disregarding as "archaic, irrational or conservative" that which did not fit the system.

However, when the modern idea of time is deconstructed, time does not seem to be a bullet directed in only one direction. It is particular rather than general and -as already stated- it depends on human relationships. Psychological research has rendered data that show how that which has come to be known as modernity is a way of life that has influenced people (producing a "modern" person) so that they may adapt to the demands and relations leading to the modernity they themselves construct. In this regard, Table 1 shows the characteristics assigned to the modern person, and Table 2, those assigned to modernity. This very necessity to define what is modern marks the coexistence of different ways of existing, being and defining, creating different times.

Tabla 1

MODERN PERSON'S CHARACTERISTICS	
Inkeles (1966)	Yang (1988)
Opening to new experiences, innovation and changes.	Opening to innovation and changes.
Give and support opinions related to a variety of topics and affairs.	Great need of information.
Democratic orientation in the opinions.	Egalitarian attitudes towards the others.
Predominant orientation towards the present and the future.	Strong orientation towards the future.
Orientation towards planning and organization.	Active participation in social organizations.
Belief in self-efficiency.	Sense of personal efficiency (anti-fatalism).
Belief in human beings' dignity and respect for the others.	Tolerance towards others and respect for them.
Belief in the predictability of the world.	Low social integration with family members.
Strong belief in science and technology.	Belief in sex equality.
Belief in distributive justice (reward according to needs).	High achievement motivation.
Punctuality, systematization.	Independence or self-sufficiency.
	Cognitive and behavior flexibility.
	Capacity for empathy.
	Individualist orientation towards the others.
	Proneness to run risks in life.
	Secularization of religious beliefs.
	Preference for urban life.
	Psychological differentiation.
	Non-local orientation.

Tabla 2: characteristics of modernity

Sources; Gergen, 1991; Montero,1994; Ibáñez,1996

- Dualism. Separation between subject and object.
- Representationalism: representation ideology.
- Rationalism: reason as a central element. Relation between reason and freedom.
- Belief in the fact that successful science is based on rational forms of procedures.
- Time independent scientific phenomena.
- Mechanism.
- Evolutionism.
- Lineal causality.
- Belief in progress.
- Irreversibility of the time arrow.
- Natural science sets the model for all forms of systematic production of knowledge.
- Belief in the strong base of truth. Truth may be pursued through reason and observation.
- Secularization (metaphoric death of God).
- Search for the essence. Pursuance of that which is essential
- Discourse of totality.
- Human behavior considered as the result of external stimuli.
- Central role of the subject and conscience.
- The subject as actor of his own history.
- Individualism.
- Egalitarianism: belief in equality.
- Need for criticism.
- Industrialization. The metaphor of the machine.
- Direction by others (Otherdirectedness).
- Universalism.

Social construction of time is produced by what Sawaia (1997) calls *argumentative communities*. Such construction is part of the permanent conversation and gestures, of the whispers and screams, of naming and renaming, of the communicative process, which is also a significant and attributive process expressed in the social influence and resistance.

Some final considerations

Modernity regarded movement both as origin and nature of change. Paradoxically, this idea comes from Aristotle, despite the fact that he considered rest as the natural condition of the human being, while modernity supports a view centered upon dynamics. However, movement in modernity is endowed with a direction, a sense of motion (forwards) and leads to the use of technology, to industrialization, to capitalism, to liberalism, through a way of making science: a hypothetico-deductive one. Advancement is considered equivalent to progress, and progress is the movement directed in the same course as development. In turn, development is only that which achieves the aims set up by modernity.

Advancement meant leaving behind stages and levels deprived of certain conditions, for once those stages are reached, they suppose a status from which it is impossible to go back. What is more, it seems as if at the same time advancement towards a

progress goal is made, the past were not only left behind but also moved in the opposite direction, going further away, taking distance from the present. In fact, the functionalist trend so important in the social sciences during the 20th century, solved the relation with the past by stating that if a phenomenon exists at present, that is because it has a function, and that quality is responsible for its perpetuation in time. If a phenomenon is present today, it was present before. Hence, the past is of no interest whatsoever, the study of the present being enough.

The Latin poet Virgil said *Tempus fugit*; however, it is not time what runs away, but rather the words and actions that will not repeat themselves in their unique nature, even when being part of the repeated gestures of everyday life. Another poet, Horace used the expression *Carpe diem*, which may be a notion befitting a constructionist perspective of time best, for even when it assumes that the day may escape our intention to seize it, it also acknowledges the possibilities of human intervention.

The critical perspective developed in the field of social psychology in the last twenty years compels us not to accept as essential any definition or concept, no matter how natural it may seem. The ideological character of naturalizations is currently denounced in the most various geographical and theoretical settings. And time, that dimension which not only rules our daily lives but also our memory, does not escape deconstruction. A different conception of time seems to be finding its own place within the field of sciences. A conception in which human beings do not appear as passive subjects in relation to time, running behind it, against it, measuring it, wasting it, being its victims and slaves, facing a phenomenon assumed to be powerful and independent. A conception in which time is revealed in its character of social construction, acknowledging that it is part of the relationships in which we become who we are.

Notes

(*). Address presented at the III Congreso Internacional de Psicología "La Psicología y sus contextos". Universidad de las Américas. Santa Catarina Mártir, Cholula, Puebla. 12 - 14 November 1998.

1. Let us remember the famous quote by St. Augustine: "¿Quod est ergo tempus?" Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio" (Confessions: Book XL. 400/1951) "What is time then?" I understand the notion if I am not required to explain it; if I want to explain it, I do not know."

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